

19. INHERITING SPEECH. TALKING BOOKS COME TO FLAVIAN ROME*

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Martial reworks the Hellenistic tradition of writing epigrams on poets, in its several types,¹ celebrating himself as well as others. Indeed the epigrammatist produces his own epitaph, which is to be inscribed on his own statue in Avitus' library (9 *praef.* 5–9); 1.1 is a self-homage, which some have thought destined to accompany his portrait; a distich on Virgil, one in a series of “tags” for books (14.183–96), would seem to fulfill the same function (14.186); Silius and Lucan are also among those commended (7.63, 11.48; 7.21–23).² Further, Martial experimented with the rare type of epigrams spoken by a book:³ for instance, the Greek *Batrachomachia*⁴ has something to say about itself—in Latin!—

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¹ On the Greek tradition of writing epigrams on poets, see Gabathuler (1937); Bing (1988a) 29–53, 58–64, (1988b), and (1993); Rossi (2001) 81–106. A typology is proposed by Gabathuler (1937) 107–11 and discussed by Rossi (2001) 85–86.

² See Citroni (1975) 14–15 and Henriksen (2012) 2, 9–10 on Martial's epigrams on himself; on the portrait tradition, see Lausberg (1982) 562 n. 7; for the other epigrams, see the commentary and bibliography in Leary (1996) 251; Galán Vioque (2002) 168–79, 364–371; Kay (1985) 173–175.

³ The small corpus was identified by McKeown (1989) 1–2.

⁴ Shackleton Bailey's edition reads *Batrachomyomachia*, but I adopt, with Leary, the reading *Batrachomachia*. Leary (1996) 26, 247–48 is right in emphasizing that the title of

(14.183), and the tenth book anticipates (possible) problems of weight before the reader even starts reading it (10.1). In this study I would like to focus on the poet's fresh and bold reenactment of such a peculiar tradition.

The practice of allowing objects to speak has a considerable relevance in the *Xenia* and the *Apophoreta*.⁵ It is true that uncommon voices in these books are a manifestation of the *mundus inuersus* and a deviation from the natural order of things.⁶ At least some of Martial's talking objects push the limits of this tradition, however, inviting comparison with certain epigrammatic pieces by Callimachus and some of his contemporaries.⁷ These poets bring out primordial conventions of epigram, namely the objects' ability to speak and possess cognition, commenting on their own dedication or on their former and current "lives."⁸ The best known "speakers" are probably Callimachus' bronze rooster (56 Pfeiffer), which confesses not to be in a position to assert what it says about its own dedication; a learned shell, competent in natural history (5 Pfeiffer); or the bored mask of Dionysus, tired of hearing schoolboys repeat one of his lines (26 Pfeiffer). Similarly, Martial's talking objects have a considerable range of expertise. Some consider linguistic the poem survives in Latin only in Martial 14.183 and in Statius *Silu. 1 praef.*, and in both cases there is no manuscript support for reading *Batrachomyomachia*.

⁵ In the *Xenia*, eighteen out of 124 epigrams are spoken by the objects (14.5%), and the same happens in fifty-five out of 221 epigrams in the *Apophoreta* (25%). Grewing (1999) 261.

⁶ Grewing (1999) 261.

⁷ On Martial and Callimachus, see Cowan and Neger extensively in this volume.

⁸ This extends to the corpses' "habit" of talking. Tueller (2008) discusses the role of voice in epigrammatic poetry; see also Bettenworth (2007) and Meyer (2007).

issues related to themselves. A dead flamingo with no tongue explains the origin of its name (13.71); a *lucerna polymyxos* and a piece of *lana amethystina* have a word to say about the appropriateness of their designation (14.41, 14.154); pronouncing its name in Latin and Greek, the *aphonitrum* attests to the fact that some objects can even be bilingual (14.58).⁹ A pheasant exhibits still other qualities, posing as an erudite biographer (13.72).

From the above, it could be assumed that the speaking *Batrachomachia* and 10.1 are by no means random voice variations. In my opinion, epigrams spoken by the book are attractive choices for Martial for specific reasons. The poet is particularly interested in the polemical attitude that characterizes the speaking book tradition since its earliest proponents. It will suffice to recall the controversial epigram by Asclepiades on Antimachus' *Lyde* (AP 9.63), to which Callimachus most probably replied, also in an epigram (398 Pfeiffer), scorning both Asclepiades' homage and Antimachus' poem; later, Callimachus' reply will have brought about a retort from Antipater of Sidon, who takes over Antimachus' defense (AP 7.490).¹⁰ Moreover, I think the possibility should not be ruled out that Martial finds interest in the language of epigrams on poets, which explores the semantics of size and value: a poem or a book is big or the greatest (AP 9.25, Callimachus); one poet is greater than another (AP 7.18, Antipater of Sidon); an island or a city is too small for a given poet (AP 7.1, Alcaeus of Messene; AP 7.2, Antipater of

⁹ See Grewing (1999) 266–69. Among the issues discussed are dialectology and the quantity of vowels.

¹⁰ See Bing (1993) on the making of this tradition. On the examples given from the *Anthologia Palatina*, see Cameron (1995) 303–7, 319–20, 330–37, 486–87; Krevans (1993).

Sidon, both on Homer; AP 7.19, Leonidas [of Tarentum?]¹¹ on Alcman). It is generally recognized that Martial is captivated by the relationship between literature and its materiality, namely in his approach to the criteria according to which literature is to be judged.¹² In the traditional hierarchy of genres, “epic” implies long size and reigns supreme, even if it is bad, while “brief” means “insignificant,” which is the case of epigram, even if not every poet has what it takes to write it—as is manifest, for example, in Gaurus’ conviction that the measure of one’s intelligence is proportionate to the length of one’s poetry.¹³

Ingenium mihi, Gaure, probas sic esse pusillum,
 carmina quod faciam quae breuitate placent.
 confiteor. sed tu bis senis grandia libris
 qui scribis Priami proelia, magnus homo es?
 nos facimus Bruti puerum, nos Langona uiuum:
 tu magnus luteum, Gaure, Giganta facis. (Mart. 9.50)

You argue that my talent is inconsiderable, Gaurus, because I make poems that please by brevity. I confess it. But you that write of Priam’s mighty battles in twice six books, are you a great man? I make a live Brutus’ Boy, a live Langon: you, Gaurus, great man that you are, make a giant of clay.

This criterion is contradicted by Tucca’s ability to surpass Martial, in all genres except in epigram (12.94.10), and by the poet’s subtle self-homage in 4.23, hinting that he cannot be

¹¹ See Gow and Page (1965) 2.308-9 on the question of authorship.

¹² Roman (2001), in particular 118–19, 123, 138, 145.

¹³ See Mart. 9.50 with Williams (2008) 223–26 and Henriksén (2012) 217–20. See also Mart. 9.43–44 with McNelis (2008), Schneider (2001), Canobbio (2008) 187–89.

rivaled and that he is on a par with Callimachus:¹⁴

Dum tu lenta nimis diuque quaeris
quis primus tibi quisue sit secundus
Graium quos epigramma comparauit,
palmam Callimachus, Thalia, de se
facundo dedit ipse Bruttiano.
qui si Cecropio satur lepore
Romanae sale luserit Mineruae,
illi me facias precor secundum. (Mart. 4.23)

As you, Thalia, investigate too leisurely and too long which of the Greeks whom
epigram has set in competition you should put in first place and which in second,
Callimachus himself conceded the palm to eloquent Bruttianus. If, replete with Attic
wit, he toys with the salt of Roman Minerva, I beg you make me second to him.

I think both talking books can be seen to further one of Martial's main objectives, namely
to deconstruct such a hierarchy,¹⁵ proving it inadequate and putting forward a different
view.

So Martial's books have some battles to fight. At first, it will seem that the problems a
good book has to face under the Flavians are not so different from those it had to confront

¹⁴ Moreno Soldevila (2006) 227. See Citroni (2006) on the generic system in the Flavian
age. Compare Mart. 12.94 with the generic hierarchy expounded in Tac. *Dial.* 10.4; see
also Pliny's apology for writing epigram (Plin. *Ep.* 5.3.2–3) and Mart. 4.49.1–2 with
Moreno Soldevila (2006) 356–63.

¹⁵ This objective has been recognized and commented upon by Sullivan (1987) and (1991)
58, 62–63, 95, 97, 102, 218.

at the beginning of the Hellenistic age. Yet the reader is left with more questions than answers: Martial appears to be working in the Hellenistic tradition, but it is difficult to assert his debt to particular poems.

1. *Celebrating Homer ... As Always?*

Critics almost unanimously adopt the view that Martial himself is the speaker of 14.183 (even though as such it would not fulfill the function for which it was created, that is, to accompany the gift announced in the *lemma*);¹⁶ Leary alone considers that voice is given to the pseudo-Homeric epic,¹⁷ which is the possibility I would like to explore. In my opinion, Martial's *Batrachomachia* is unique in that it is the only bilingual book in the tradition of epigrams on poets, and I show how significant that might be. Another issue must be taken into account when addressing the tradition behind this epigram. If it is accepted that Archelaus' relief on the apotheosis of Homer does not allude to the *Batrachomachia*,¹⁸ then Martial's epigram is the oldest reference to the poem, followed closely by that of Statius (*Silu.* 1 *praef.*).¹⁹ These *loci* would attest to the poem's

¹⁶ Pini (2006) 476 calls attention to this aspect; for bibliography see 476 n. 2.

¹⁷ Leary (1996) 248.

¹⁸ This proposal has been generally accepted. Wölke (1978) 64–68 summarizes the story of the monument's interpretation; see also West (1969) 123, n. 35.

¹⁹ Stat. *Silu.* 1 *praef.*: *sed et Culicem legimus et Batrachomachiam etiam agnoscimus, nec quisquam est inlustrium poetarum qui non aliquid operibus suis stilo remissiore praeluserit* ("But we read *The Gnat* and even recognize *The Battle of the Frogs*; and none of our illustrious poets but has preluded his works with something in lighter vein."). See Easterling and Knox (1985) 39, West (2003) 229.

circulation under the name of Homer by Domitian's time;²⁰ what is more, they would bear witness to Martial's and Statius' acceptance of its Homeric authorship.²¹ Nevertheless, I find it highly doubtful that these poets could have been unfamiliar with the polemics surrounding the assignment of a number of works to Homer, a topic much debated for centuries in Homeric scholarship.²² I think the question should be left open whether Martial and Statius subscribe to this, especially since, in both cases, a programmatic statement is at stake.

There is no novelty in an epigram celebrating the most renowned of poets,²³ but it is surely peculiar to choose to commemorate the greatest of poets in the lowest of genres. Indeed Martial may have found his only precedent in Callimachus. The Greek poet had already sung of one, possibly two pseudo-Homeric poems: some sources attest to an epigram in which the *Margites* is attributed to Homer and enjoyed Callimachus' admiration (such statements invite an extremely cautious approach);²⁴ what is more, the

²⁰ Wölke (1978) 68; West (2003) 235.

²¹ Leary (1996) 247–48 does not discuss the point, whereas Vollmer (1898) 211 stresses the accepting tone of Statius' remark.

²² See the remarks by Wölke (1978) 69.

²³ Skiadas (1965) is entirely devoted to the celebration of Homer in Greek epigram.

²⁴ Harpocration, a second-century CE Alexandrian grammarian, s. v. Μαργίτης; Eustratius ad Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 6.7.2. See Bossi (1986) 45 n. 4, Gabathuler (1937) 13, Cessi (1907) 5–43. On the poem *Margites*, see Glei (1999) 885–86 with bibliography. Bossi (1986) 7 goes too far in concluding from the testimony that Callimachus actually admired the *Margites*; Pfeiffer (1949–53) 1.325 draws attention to the final verb, εοικεν (“he seems to”).

one Callimachean epigram we possess on a pseudo-Homeric poem, the *Oichalias Halosis*, is spoken by the book (*Ep.* 6 Pfeiffer). So Martial is not an innovator in singing of a minor work circulating under Homer's name. And yet, even if Callimachus is somehow relevant to Martial's talking book, the Flavian poet goes beyond his predecessor. The epigram furthers an ambitious poetic agenda, and, in my opinion, in a particularly original way:

Homeri Batrachomachia

Perlege Maeonio cantatas carmine ranas

et frontem nugis soluere disce meis. (Mart. 14.183)

Homer's *Batrachomachia*

Read through the frogs sung in Maeonian song and learn to relax your brow with my trifles.

In my opinion, despite the *lemma*, Martial creates the illusion that we are reading an epigram about the Homeric epics: these, and not the 300-verse mock-epic, would be the poems a bad reader needs to be encouraged to read until the end, *perlegere*. Furthermore, *Maeonium ... carmen* is a classic periphrasis, for instance in Horace and Ovid,²⁵ for the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Consequently, only the last word of the hexameter, *ranas*, destroys the illusion that this is an epigram about the best of Homer.

The second line poses the problem of the speaker's identity. The book tells the readers of the relaxed attitude they will experience. Elsewhere, Martial depicts in a similar way his reader's relaxation while enjoying his epigrams (4.14) and recommends them to Pliny as

²⁵ According to Galán Vioque (2002) 289–90, the periphrasis becomes usual in Greek poetry from the second century BCE; e.g., Antipater of Sidon (AP 7.2.1–2), Aceratus (AP 7.138.3). First occurrences in Latin poetry: *Ciris* 62; Hor. *Carm.* 1.6.2, 4.9.5; Prop. 2.28.29. It is particularly frequent in Ovid: *Rem.* 373, *Ars* 2.4, *Pont.* 3.3.31.

“light reading” to be savored at a particular time of day (10.20).²⁶ With regard to *nugis ... meis*, Martial frequently employs this expression when discussing his own writings²⁷ (therefore, this epigram has been taken to be spoken by Martial, who thus refers in the first person to his trifles).

Of course Martial intends to stress the similarities between what he chooses to write and what Homer allegedly wrote. But there is more to it. If the *Batrachomachia* is the speaker, the book’s self-depiction as *nugae* places it at the bottom of the traditional hierarchy of genres, alongside Martial’s own epigrams. Homer would thus become the first writer of *nugae*; we discover that this practice goes back to the beginning of Greek literature and to its greatest poet, who thus becomes Martial’s predecessor. Martial reinterprets literary history in order to ennoble epigram. His epigrams would be seen to continue a less valued branch of Homeric poetry, light and playful, but nonetheless worthy of the greatest of poets. In addition, as mentioned above, we are frequently told that others can be brilliant in their genres, but not in Martial’s; he is without doubt the “Homer of epigram,” a poet whose expertise in his genre cannot be surpassed.

Other instances in which Martial attempts to ennoble the genre of epigram can be related to the *Batrachomachia*’s speech. The tablets of citrus-wood, the first in a series of writing materials, are allowed to speak as well:

Pugillares citrei

Secta nisi in tenues essemus ligna tabellas,

essemus Libyci nobile dentis onus. (Mart. 14.3)

²⁶ Cf. also Mart. 4.8.7–12, 7.26.5, 10.64.2; Stat. *Silu.* 1.3.91–92, 2.6.65–66; Sil. 2.414, 3.298; Apul. *Met.* 9.27.20–21.

²⁷ E.g., Mart. 1.113.6, 2.1.6, 4.10.4, 5.80.3, 6.64.7–8, 7.11.4, 9 *praef.* 5, 10.18.4, 13.2.4.

Tablets of citrus wood

If we had not been cut into thin tablets, we should be the noble burden of a Libyan tusk.

The tablets present themselves as an object made of a very expensive wood, but not very durable in that specific format. The wood they are made of could make an exquisite table with ivory legs. They are indeed an extravagance, but in my opinion such extravagance has a literary meaning as well. The wood is used as raw material for very perishable and valueless objects, the writing tablets, when it could be used to build an expensive and valuable object, an exquisite table. The same is applied to poetry. Raw material does not distinguish noble poetry from playful trifles. To prove it, many epigrams on *sigillaria* (14.170–82), the section that precedes the book list in the *Apophoreta*, treat epic material. In fact, Hinds has convincingly demonstrated that the *Metamorphoses* and the *Aeneid* are the intertext of several epigrams in this series;²⁸ in addition, in the series devoted to *sigillaria*, Martial explores epic episodes where he finds some trace of an epigrammatic commemoration, seen to anticipate his literary project in the *Apophoreta*. Hinds describes it as “an extraction of epigrams” from epic poems and calls the phenomenon “epigrammatic distillation.”²⁹ Accordingly, the raw material that Martial turns into epigram is apt for epic poetry. He chooses to apply it, nonetheless, to the lowest of genres, and opts provocatively for the minimal form, the monodistich. Hence there is no point in

²⁸ Hinds (2007) 139–46 speaks of an “aesthetic negotiation” (141) with the *Metamorphoses* in Mart. 14.173 (*Hyacinthus in tabula pictus*), 14.174 (*Hermaphroditus marmoreus*), 14.180 (*Europe picta*). The *Aeneid* is recalled à propos of 14.178 (*Hercules fictilis*).

²⁹ Hinds (2007) 143.

insisting that subject matter is a criterion for distinguishing elevated, long poems from occasional, small trifles. Martial shows that such an approach is unsustainable.

I think another ennobling strategy explains, at least partially, the distribution of the books into cheap and expensive gifts:

	EXPENSIVE GIFTS	CHEAP GIFTS
Mart. 14.183–196	183 Homer, <i>Batrachomachia</i>	184 Homer, <i>Iliad and Odyssey</i>
	185 Virgil, <i>Culex</i>	186 Virgil, <i>Aeneid</i>
	187 Menander, <i>Thais</i>	188 Cicero
	189 Propertius, <i>Monobyblos</i>	190 Livy
	191 Sallust	192 Ovid, <i>Metamorphoses</i>
	193 Tibullus	194 Lucan
	195 Catullus	196 Calvus?

Several attempts have been made to explain the distribution of literary works into sequences of poor and expensive gifts, but no attempt successfully accounts for the whole list. Critics have gone so far as to suppose *lacunae* in order to explain the failure to reach a conclusion.³⁰ In what concerns the location of the *Batrachomachia* at the head of the book-series and as an expensive gift, some readers find it odd that it has been given such honor, particularly when the Homeric epics come next; Pini proposes that such an

³⁰ On this issue, Pini (2006). See also Birt (1882) 71–87; Friedrich (1907) 373–74; Roberts and Skeat (1983) 26–28; Leary (1996) 13–21; Muñoz Jiménez (1996).

“oddity” is due to an accidental inversion of the order of epigrams 183 and 184.³¹ Physical impossibilities, however, like a one-volume Livy, suggest that Martial is playing an ambitious game:

Titus Livius in membranis
Pellibus exiguus artatur Livius ingens,
quem mea non totum bibliotheca capit. (Mart. 14.190)

Titus Livius on parchment
Vast Livy, for whom complete my library does not have room, is compressed in tiny skins.

The poet is not interested in the relationship between the books as he depicts them and any real object.³² In my opinion, the tradition of writing epigrams on poets has also undergone an “epigrammatic distillation”: it exhibits the minimal form, and its eulogistic language has been “filtered”; it only matters what one can measure, count and weigh. Accordingly, the cheap gifts are all lengthy works: the epics (Homer, Virgil, Ovid, Lucan) and prose writers who are known for having written at length (Cicero, Livy); whether to read Calvus or Calidus remains uncertain, as also their literary output. By contrast, the expensive gifts are those which are usually referred to as *lusus*: Homer and Virgil’s minor works; Menander, whom the Romans considered a love poet; the elegists; of course Catullus, the master of *nugae*; and finally Sallust, whose work is miniature when compared to Livy’s—but even so he is “the first among historians.” Hence, in Martial’s world and in defense of his aesthetic inclination, the lighter literary works are more valuable than the weightier.

³¹ It should be said that Pini also admits another hypothesis (on which see below).

³² Roman (2001) 134–36. On Mart. 14.190, see Friedländer (1886) 2.338, Butrica (1983), Sansone (1980–81).

Bigger does not mean better. This, in the end, is what Martial means to stress, in defense of his aesthetic decision to cultivate the lightest of forms. Furthermore, as I have advanced above, some poems of the *Apophoreta* may show the poet stressing the need to review the criteria according to which literature should be evaluated. Therefore, small, insignificant objects are seen to start thematic sequences in the *Apophoreta*, like the *Batrachomachia* and the writing tablets of citrus wood. This is also why, against what one might expect, briefer literary works and those said to be *lusus*, like epigram, are the expensive ones. Epigram has its worth; small can be equally as noble and equally as good.

2. Too Good For You

Martial's tenth book bears a close relationship to the preface of Ovid's *Amores*, as has been recognized:³³

Si nimius uideor seraque coronide longus

esse liber, legito pauca: libellus ero.

terque quaterque mihi finitur carmine paruo³⁴

³³ Lorenz (2002) 221 n. 49. McKeown (1989) 2–3 enrolls Mart. 10.1 in the corpus of the epigrams spoken by the book; Morena Soldevila (2006) 516 relates Ovid's epigram to Mart. 4.82; Roman (2001) 136 associates it to Mart. 14.2.

³⁴ I do not agree with the reading *parua* / *pagina*, advanced by Immisch (1911) 514 and adopted by Shackleton Bailey. In my opinion, the idea that the page is (already) small does not conform to Martial's intents. First, it is the reader who is (supposedly) to turn the book into a small work, if he wishes to; according to this point of view, the book should appear not to be physically defined until the reader does so; Martial is precisely offering him the

pagina: fac tibi me quam cupis ipse breuem. (Mart. 10.1)

Comentado [U1]: elegiac distichs

If I seem too large and long a book with colophon that comes too late, read a few items only: I shall then be a little book. My pages quite often end with the end of a little poem. Make me as brief for yourself as you like.

Qui modo Nasonis fueramus quinque libelli,
tres sumus; hoc illi praetulit auctor opus.
ut iam nulla tibi nos sit legisse uoluptas,
at leuior demptis poena duobus erit. (Ov. *Am. praef.*)

We who erewhile were five booklets of Naso now are three; the poet has preferred to have his work thus rather than as before. Though even now you may take no joy of reading us, yet with two books taken away your pains will be lighter.

Ovid's *Amores* and Martial's book 10 are joined by the much discussed connection that they are said to be "second versions" or, as it is usually expressed, "second editions." Moreover, both books address the issue of length and relate it to the reader's liking, and in both cases it is implied that the reader's aesthetic criteria are doubtful; in addition, the book's transformation is at stake in both epigrams. But although Martial's preface is indebted to Ovid's, the books tell a quite different story. This debt should not determine the approach to the poem's place in the tradition of epigrams on poets, lest it blur the need to investigate its direct links with tradition. As regards the tortuous question of the

opportunity. Therefore, I find the *iunctura carmine paruo* much more probable: it alludes to the genre of the whole book, by reference to its defining shortness and lightness.

“second edition,” one should keep in mind, for the purpose of the present discussion,³⁵ that it is announced by Ovid, but not by Martial. Martial postpones this information until the second epigram, suppressing it from the book’s speech and turning it into one of the poet’s commentaries on the book:³⁶

Festinata prius, decimi mihi cura libelli

³⁵ There are two main ways of approaching the problem of Ovid’s and Martial’s “second edition.” Some take the books’ words literally, accepting that both were “reworked,” therefore trying to explain the poets’ motivations and speculating on the changes which the books underwent. On Ovid, see Müller (1856) 81; Reitzenstein (1935); Oliver (1945); d’Elia (1958); Luck (1961); Giomini (1959); Lenz (1965) 164; Cameron (1968) 320–22, 328–30 and (1995) 156–60; Martini (1970) 14; Jacobson (1974) 301; Sabot (1976); Murgia (1986); della Corte (1986) 70; McKeown (1987) 74–89. On Martial, see Friedländer (1886) 2.108; Sullivan (1991) 44, 52; Pitcher (1998) 70–71; Fearnley (2003) 617; Damschen and Heil (2004) 3–8; Moreno Soldevila (2004–5) xvii n. 46; Fitzgerald (2007) 160–62. Others consider that the “second edition” should be interpreted as “metapoetic play” or as a façade. On Ovid see Barchiesi (2001) 159–61; Boyd (1997) 142–47 and (2002) 110–13; Bretzigheimer (2001) 91–94; Holzberg (2002c) 31–34 and (2006) 58–60. On Martial, see Holzberg (2004–5) 213–19. For a more sceptical approach to Martial’s motivations both for returning to Spain and for reworking book 10, see Syme (1958) 1.86–92; Coleman (1993); Howell (1998) 184–85; Holzberg (2002b) 140–48; Howell (2009) 67–70. More generally, see Fowler (1995) on reading Martial’s comments as “generic pretence.”

³⁶ In my opinion, 10.1 and 10.2 form a pair, the allusion to Ovid’s preface being one of the links between them.

elapsum manibus nunc reuocauit opus.

nota leges quaedam sed lima rasa recenti;

pars noua maior erit: lector, utrique faue. (Mart. 10.2.1–4)

Comentado [U2]: elegiac distichs

In composing my tenth little book, too hastily issued earlier, I have now recalled the work that then slipped from my hands. Some of the pieces you will read are already known, but polished with a recent file, the greater part will be new. Reader, wish well to both.

The author wishes to have nothing to do with the act of abridgement. On the contrary, it is Ovid who allegedly turns the *Amores* into a shorter work; as a consequence of the poet's decision, the reader will be relieved (*leuior ... poena ... erit*, Ov. *Am. praef.* 4). Martial, quite differently, has no intention of shortening his book, which he leaves up to his readers (Mart. 10.1.4). His task as an author is done. In Martial, the book's story appears to depend on the reader (*si nimius uideor ... legito pauca*, 10.1.1–2; *fac tibi me ...*, 4), whereas that of the *Amores* is the author's own responsibility (*hoc illi praetulit auctor opus*, Ov. *Am. praef.* 2). Furthermore, the *Amores* may be said to present a biographical account of itself. As noted above, this feature is very common in dedicatory epigrams, in some of which the dedicated object compares its former life to its ("new") existence as an *ex uoto*.³⁷ By contrast, Martial's book 10 focuses on the future, commenting on what it may become, if readers choose to shorten it. Besides, brevity seems to be far more relevant to Martial than to Ovid, and invites discussion on several levels: genre, book, poem, verse,

³⁷ The *Anthologia Palatina* preserves many epigrams spoken by votive objects, especially in book 6, devoted to dedicatory epigrams. See, e.g., AP 6.124, 125, and 127 (shields); 6.49 (a tripod), 107 (a spear), 113 (a horn), 148 (a lamp), 159 (a trumpet). On the subject see Tueller (2008).

and language. The poet emphasizes, in particular, the paradox of the *epigrammaton liber*, an *opus* showing the coherence of a poetry book, although formed by the accumulation of many small units;³⁸ closely related to this is the relevance of brevity in the definition of epigram.³⁹

By comparing Ovid's and Martial's treatment of analogous topics, it becomes clear how original the latter's approach is. In fact, it is only when we go beyond the similarities between the speeches in the *Amores* and Martial's book 10 that the most interesting questions arise. I wish to suggest that these concern Martial's direct knowledge of the Greek tradition of writing epigrams on poets, in particular that of letting the book speak for itself.

In Hellenistic poetry, the speaking books introduce themselves. As part of the presentation they say who they are and identify their author. For example, in a famous epigram by Asclepiades, *Lyde* plays with its title: Λυδῇ καὶ γένος εἰμι καὶ οὐνομα· (“I am ‘Lyde’ in race and name”); it proclaims it is the joint work of the Muses and Antimachus (AP 9.63= XXXII Sens); again, in the epigram by Callimachus mentioned above, Creophylus’ *Oichalias Halosis* plays with authorial recognition and also says what it is about: κλείω δ’ Εὐρυτον ὅσσ’ ἐπαύεν, / καὶ ξανθῆν Τόλειαν (“My subject is Eurytos, his agonies, and blond Ioleia”, 6.2–3 Pfeiffer).⁴⁰

³⁸ Fitzgerald (2007) 2–3.

³⁹ See Citroni (2003) and Canobbio (2008) 169–170 n. 2 with further bibliography.

⁴⁰ Cf. also the anonymous epigram spoken by Lycophron’s *Alexandra* (AP 9.191), cited below; the charming collection of lyric poets to be offered to Antonia, which identifies itself as such in an epigram by Crinagoras (AP 9.239); the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*’s introduction in the first person in an epigram by Antiphilus of Byzantium (AP 9.192).

Additionally, although the *Amores* do not announce its subject, it presents itself as the work of Ovid (*Nasonis*, 1). Surprisingly, we find nothing similar in Martial's preface. The book does not acknowledge its author and does not present or hint at its subject in any way. In fact, the tenth book says nothing about what it is; on the contrary, and against the speaking book tradition, it avoids defining itself. It is noticeable that it never says it is too long or too big but that it may seem so in the eyes of the reader. Furthermore, it does not comment on its size, but on the reader's judgment about its size. The only thing Martial reveals about the book is its willingness to be shortened at the reader's will.

The structure of the book's speech reflects the ideas it puts forward. The book's characterization literally depends upon the reader's view: *esse* depends on *uideor*, which is emphasized between two *caesurae*,⁴¹ and this dependence takes place within a conditional clause. It is significant that the book is only allowed to be something in the future, when the reader has already made his judgment and acted upon it: at that time, it states, *libellus ero* (2). Also the *liber* turns into a *libellus* in the same verse, showing how quick its transformation can be, if the reader so desires. Moreover, the possibility that the book seems too long reveals itself in the structure of the couplet. *Nimius* (1) is expected to find a noun at the end of the hexameter; but in that position we notice another adjective pointing to excess, *longus*. Thus *liber* is postponed until the pentameter, therefore appearing ... "too late." The sentence is too long; it does not fit into the hexameter. In fact, one of its components, *seraque coronide*, is something that could be dispensed with. An enthusiast for conciseness could point out that it is not even necessary to the sentence's correctness, since it adds no new idea and the belated appearance of the end is already implied in the excessive length of the book. Hence it is not only that the *coronis* might come too late—it

⁴¹ See also Mart. 10.10.11.

is already delaying the poem's rhythm. It only makes the poem longer, causing us to wait a little more for the word *liber* and for the end of the first sentence. It is as if the word arrangement mirrored what the readers might think of the book: some pieces are dispensable, wasting our time. In the last verse, the book shows once again its ability to become shorter: its invitation to the reader (*fac tibi me quam cupis ipse breuem*, 4) occupies less than a pentameter and is expressed in short words, all of them mono- or bisyllabic, and none of them longer than one foot. Within the first epigram, words are already shorter; consequently, the reading has already become quicker.

Concerning the book's appearance, there is another point to be made. As is well known, the book's voice is indebted to an ancient epigrammatic tradition according to which the dedicated object speaks for itself. The epigrams would be inscribed on the object, which would be in the reader's hands or in the reader's sight. Martial might be playing with the ancestral relationship between inscribed epigram and inscribed object—a favorite issue for ancient epigrammatists⁴²—since a literary epigram can be said to be inscribed on the book. This allows Martial to exploit the reader's reaction to the book's physical appearance. Yet *uideor* does not decide between physical and intellectual perception (*OLD* s.v. *uideo* 20 and 22). It is true that the readers are just beginning to read, so they could not yet have an opinion about the quality of the book.⁴³ But they do. In book 10, we are already acquainted with Martial's readers. They judge poetry "by the Persian chain" (*Call. Aet. fr. 1.18*); an epigram of many verses will be skipped:

⁴² Gutzwiller (1998) 7–9; Meyer (2007) ; Tueller (2008) 141–93. On Martial, see Fowler (1995) 53–56.

⁴³ Another argument would be that it is in fact already Martial's tenth book, not counting the *De Spectaculis*, the *Xenia*, and the *Apophoreta*.

conueniat nobis ut fas epigrammata longa

sit transire tibi, scribere, Tucca, mihi. (Mart. 6.65.5–6)

Let us make a bargain: it shall be your privilege to skip long epigrams and mine,
Tucca, to write them.

Consumpta est uno si lemmate pagina, transis,

et breuiora tibi, non meliora placent. (Mart. 10.59.1–2)

Comentado [U3]: elegiac distichs

If a page is used up with a single title, you pass it by; you like the shorter items, not the
better ones.

Therefore, the idea that the book appears too big and too long can point both to the
extravagant size of the collection and to poetry so bad that the book seems unending.⁴⁴

This is what Martial intended to stress concerning his readers: their appreciation of poetry
does not distinguish between quality and quantity. Cosconius' attitude is paradigmatic:⁴⁵

Cosconi, qui longa putas epigrammata nostra,

utilis unguendis axibus esse potes.

hac tu credideris longum ratione colosson

et puerum Bruti dixeris esse breuem.

disce quod ignoras: Marsi doctique Pedonis

saepe duplex unum pagina tractat opus.

⁴⁴ Such play between the physical attributes of a book and the qualities of the poetry it
encloses is far from being a novelty (cf., e.g., Catull. 1). Both interpretations have also
been proposed for Callimachus' famous fr. 465 Pfeiffer; on Callimachean aesthetics, see
Cowan in this volume.

⁴⁵ On Mart. 2.77 and 10.59, see Williams (2008); cf. also Lausberg (1982) 51.

non sunt longa quibus nihil est quod demere possis,

sed tu, Cosconius, disticha longa facis. (Mart. 2.77)

Comentado [U4]: elegiac distichs

Cosconius, you that think my epigrams too long, you would do fine for greasing axles.

At that rate you would find the Colossus too tall and call Brutus' boy too short. Let me tell you what you do not know: two pages of Marsus and accomplished Pedo often cover a single item. Things from which you cannot make any deduction are not long.

But you, Cosconius, make long couplets.

This agrees well with their supposed willingness to skip poems, ignoring that a poetry book depends on the articulation of all its pieces. Such criteria are crude and old-fashioned. In a word, Martial's readers are not ready for him.

It has been noted that the book's invitation intends to put off the bad reader,⁴⁶ whose profile the poet has been tracing since his first books. The epigrammatic reader evaluates poems and books by their length and loses interest very quickly, unless you present her or him with lasciviousness and obscenity:

lectis uix tibi paginis duabus

spectas eschatocollion, Severe,

et longas trahis oscitationes. (Mart. 2.6.2-4)

You have hardly read a couple of pages, Severus, and you are looking at the final sheet and fetching lengthy yawns.

iam lector queriturque deficitque,

iam librarius hoc et ipse dicit

'ohe, iam satis est, ohe, libelle.' (Mart. 4.89.7-9)

⁴⁶ See in particular Henderson (2001) 81.

Already the reader grows querulous and weary, already the very copyst says: “Whoa, there’s enough, whoa now, little book!”

Huc est usque tibi scriptus, matrona, libellus.

cui sint scripta rogas interiora? mihi.

gymnasium, thermae, stadium est hac parte: recede.

exuimur: nudos parce uidere uiros ...

si bene te noui, longum iam lassa libellum

ponebas, totum nunc studiosa leges. (Mart. 3.68.1–4, 11–12)

Thus far, matron, my little book has been written for you. For whom are the latter parts written, you ask? For me. The gymnasium, the warm baths, the running track are in this portion. Retire; we are undressing. Forbear to look upon naked males ... If I know you well, you were already weary of the lengthy volume and putting it aside; but now you will read with interest to the end.

By offering the reader the possibility of skipping poems, as in epigram 10.1, Martial creates a defense strategy against bad readers:⁴⁷

Quo uis cumque loco potes hunc finire libellum:

uersibus explicitum est omne duobus opus.

lemmata si quaeris cur sint adscripta, docebo:

ut, si malueris, lemmata sola legas. (Mart. 14.2)

You can finish this book at any place you choose. Every performance is completed in two lines. If you ask why headings are added, I will tell you: so that, if you prefer, you may read the headings only.

⁴⁷ Cf. also Mart. 6.65.5–6, cited above.

si nimis est legisse duos, tibi charta plicetur

altera: diuisum sic breue fiet opus. (Mart. 4.82.7–8)

If two is too much to read, you may fold up one of the rolls. Divided, the work will thus become short.

Only those who understand the playfulness of this invitation have what it takes to continue reading.

This is the kind of attitude we find in the epigrams spoken by Lycophron's *Alexandra* (AP 9.191)⁴⁸ and by Philitas' *klethre* (if this is really a book, as I will assume here, and if it is an epigram and not a fragment):

Οὐκ ἂν ἐν ἡμετέροισι πολυγνάμπτοις λαβυρίνθοις
ῥηϊδίως προμόλοις ἐς φάος, αἶκε τύχης·
τοίους γὰρ Πριαμὶς Κασσάνδρῃ φοίβασε μύθους,
ἄγγελος οὗς βασιλεῖ ἔφρασε λοξοτρόχισ.
εἰ δέ σε φίλατο Καλλιόπη, λάβε μ' ἐς χέρας· εἰ δὲ
νῆϊς ἔφυς Μουσέων, χερσὶ βάρους φορέεις. (AP 9.191)

Not easily, being in my labyrinth of many turnings, will you find your way to the light, if at all. So ill to read is the prophetic message that Cassandra, Priam's daughter, tells here to the King in crooked speech. Yet, if Calliope loves you, take me up; but if you are ignorant of the Muses, I am a weight in your hands.

Οὐ μέ τις ἐξ ὁρέων ἀποφώλιος ἀγροιώτης

⁴⁸ On the identity of Lycophron, see Hollis (2007), who argues that this is the scholar and tragedian from Calchis (third century BCE).

αἰρήσει κλήθρην αἰρόμενος μακέλην,
 ἀλλ' ἐπέων εἰδὼς κόσμον καὶ πολλὰ μογήσας
 μύθων παντοίων οἶμον ἐπιστάμενος. (Philitas fr. 25 Spanoudakis)

It is not some benighted, mattock-raising rustic from the mountains who will remove me, an alder, but he who knows the arrangement of words and, having gone through much toil, knows the path of every kind of tale.

Like the book she introduces, Cassandra's discourse is not easy reading. Her message, which a slave reproduces for more than a thousand lines (did the tragedy's atypical structure lead the anonymous poet to endow the book with voice?), is λοξοτρόχης, a *hapax legomenon* based on words from the epilogue of the *Alexandra* (1461–74),⁴⁹ that is, from the few verses which, as the poem's prologue (1–3), do not convey the heroine's words. (Was the epigrammatist also lost in the labyrinth, being unable to enter the bulk of the poem?) The epigram plays with the Callimachean metaphor of the weight of poetry,⁵⁰ which is best known from Apollo's speech in the *Aetia* prologue (1.23–24); also he who will not be able to “carry” the *Alexandra*, one “ignorant of the Muse”, appears to take his characterization from the *Telchines*: νήϊς ἔφυς Μουσέων, χερσὶ βάρος φορέεις. (AP 9.191.6); νήιδες οἱ Μούσης οὐκ ἐγένοντο φίλοι (“who, ignorant of the Muse, were not born as her friend (Call. *Aet.* 1.2). Lycophron's *Alexandra* warns that it is difficult to find the way into the light from within its labyrinth, and that

⁴⁹ West (2000).

⁵⁰ As regards heaviness, it might be significant that, at the end of the prologue, the poet proudly states that not even the “weight” of old age, which is heavy on him (1.35–36), will alter his relationship with the Muses, whereas in the epigram it is the reader's relationship with the Muses that determines the book's weight.

only a friend of the Muses will be able to carry it home; for those who do not enjoy such intimacy with the goddesses, the book will become a burden.

Philitas' piece poses other questions. In the first couplet, the speaker identifies itself as an alder which the rustic from the mountains will not be able to cut down with an axe and remove—would be understandable without resorting to a metaphorical meaning, if not for the fact that the *alnus glutinosa* does not live in the mountains (Theoph. *Hist. plant.*

3.3.1).⁵¹ In the second couplet, the *klethre* delineates the profile of the figure opposed to the rustic. He is endowed with specific qualities: εἰδῶς (3), ἐπιστάμενος (4), πολλὰ μογήσας (3); only he who went through this process is able to grasp the form (ἐπέων ... κόσμον, 3) and the contents (μύθων παντοίων ὅμιον, 4). It becomes clear that what is at stake here is not a tree. And if it is not a tree, then the action is not that of cutting down and taking away. Actually, the verb αἰρήσει shows the same ambiguity as *uideor* in Martial 10.1 (*si nimius uideor seraque coronide longus / esse liber*, 1–2): both have a physical and an intellectual meaning, and the last one, “to grasp with the mind or understand” (*LSJ* s.v. αἰρέω), conforms to the erudition demanded from the man described in the second couplet (note εἰδῶς, πολλὰ μογήσας, ἐπιστάμενος, 3–4). In this context, the *klethre* has been identified with a book⁵² (although tablets made

⁵¹ Spanoudakis (2001) 438.

⁵² Or another object related to writing. The *klethre* might also be a stock, a poetic symbol in Theoc. 7.43–44, 128–29; it would be, in that case, an *apophoreton*. See Bowie (1985) 75, accepted by Sickel (1975) 59 n. 61. By analogy with Antimachus' *Lyde*, the *klethre* would be a woman (maybe *Bittis*?), rejecting the rustic's love and opting for that of the scholar; see Reitzenstein (1893). Wilamowitz (1924) 1.116 supposes a textual error. See

of *alnus glutinosa* are rare and those found in Vindolanda can be explained by the abundance of that tree in the region).⁵³ This would make the epigram an epigraph for a book, and *klethre* would be a title or some way of referring to a work by Philitas.⁵⁴ The *klethre* comments on its own quality by selecting the qualified reader. What is more, the epigrammatist seems to observe the imperative recognized by the *klethre* in line 3, putting much care into the structure of the epigram (ἐπέων... κόσμον, 3): he distinguishes the cultivated from the rustic with the rhetorical formula οὐ ... / ἄλλ' ... (1–3), dividing the poem into two parts, each one extending to a distich; each distich comprises eleven words: seven in the hexameter, four in the pentameter. Furthermore, the book proffers a statement which is compatible with Callimachean aesthetics; it has even been argued that it might have influenced the *Aetia* prologue. Spanoudakis points out that the alder is a tall, McKay (1978) 37 and Spanoudakis (2002) 318–20 for a synthesis of the interpretation of the word.

⁵³ As for the material of the writing tablets, there is a parallel in Euripides, where *peuke* designates the writing tablets (*IA* 39, *Hipp.* 1253–54; cf. also Plato *Leg.* 741c, [Long.] *Subl.* 4.6). A talking tablet has come down to us (AP 14.45, 60), posing an enigma on its own identity, and even the wax on a talking tablet speaks (AP 14.45). See Kuchenmüller (1928) 62 and Bing (1988a) 33 n. 52, Spanoudakis (2002) 319.

⁵⁴ *Klethre* can be the title of a book, but we possess no notice of such a work by Philitas, or a work which could be alluded to with reference to a *klethre*. The most seductive proposal makes *klethre* the lost work to which Callimachus alludes in the prologue of the *Aetia*; but this presupposes Housman's reading for the beginning of line 10, δρῶν. See McKay (1978) 36–44, Spanoudakis (2002) 321 and (2001) 438–41; Cameron (1995) 316–17 proposes an emphatic particle for the place where Housman reads δρῶν.

imposing tree, and therefore its size could contrast with that of the book;⁵⁵ could Philitas' proverbial thinness⁵⁶ contrast with the "weight" of the alder? Bing persuasively suggests that the epigram alerts the reader to the book's allusive character. In fact, *klethre*'s speech is all the more interesting for this discussion because it has been claimed that it could have prefaced a book of epigrams by Philitas.⁵⁷ Be that as it may, the rustic appears to be the reader who is unprepared for the reading ahead of him.

Klethre's readers should be able to grasp its form and content: the book needs a reader who masters the arrangement of words (ἐπέων . . . κόσμον, 3) and every kind of tale (μύθων παντοίων, 4). Martial's book 10 longs for a reader who appreciates the arrangement of poems within the book, and therefore understands that its invitation to skip poems at will is parodic. For one ignorant of the Muses, the *Alexandra* will be a burden, and, one might add, Martial's tenth book will seem too long. Someone who cannot grasp the *klethre* will not understand the book, as in Martial only the reader who acknowledges he has to read through it is ready to grasp the collection. *Alexandra* and the *klethre* know they are hard reading, and they choose to warn the reader about it. They do not want to be simpler or easier to read; they just want the readers to know what kind of skills they are expected to have if they are to read them. In my opinion, this is overtly the case in Martial. Book 10 does not apologize for being long; it teases those who will judge it according to the wrong criteria.

⁵⁵ Spanoudakis (2001) 439.

⁵⁶ Cameron (1995) 488–93.

⁵⁷ Kuchenmüller (1928) 62, with the agreement of Cataudella (1967) 404 and Spanoudakis (2002) 321.

3. *In the End*

The *Batrachomachia*—if the book is indeed the speaker—goes beyond all its predecessors when it comes to discussing the poet’s aesthetic choice for *nugae*, acquiring a new language. The book also acts like a *grammaticus*, like some of its predecessors, and by doing so it takes part in a polemic about epigram’s value as literature. So does the tenth book of Martial. It fears bad readers, like some of its Greek ancestors. Actually, it would have been a bold and suggestive move by Martial to try to ennoble the book by showing it tormented by the same problems as the cryptic *Alexandra* or the allusive *klethre*. Even though there is no textual evidence or verbal echoes, there are common features clearly belonging to the same tradition, and in my opinion these should not be dismissed as coincidences. They point to a common background to which the preface to the *Amores* also belongs. This is also the case when we focus on the book series in the *Apophoreta* as a whole. To me, it clearly revives the tradition of writing epigrams on poets, but it blurs the recognition of links to specific Greek poems.

Epigram, Ovid, Martial, talking books, *Apophoreta*, *Batrachomachia*, generic hierarchy.